

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.15 : Tape 15**

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Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
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Gender: Male
Age: 58
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government and discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses in detail the political reforms of the Chinese and the delay in implementing them in order to appease the people of Tibet. He also discusses the Chinese attitude towards the Dalai Lama and the treatment and attitudes of the people pertaining to the Dalai Lama's visit to India.

Tape 15

Q: The Dalai Lama probably stayed in China for about one year and [then] he came back, and then the Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region was instituted, right?

A: Yes.

Q: I heard that when the Dalai Lama met Zhou Enlai in India, he said that the democratic reform could be postponed for 6 years. Since the Chinese arrival in 1950, what were they talking about? Were they saying that socialism was good and we should go on the socialist path? Or were they saying that we should implement the reforms? Did they say those things in the Youth League or did they send people to the countryside and talk about that [there]?

A: Basically, it was written in the 17-Point [Agreement] that the reforms would be implemented. After the Chinese came to Tibet and when they said that they were going to implement it right away, it was said, "As for the implementation of the Agreement, there are many things that are not suitable with the customs [Tib. goms gshis] of Tibet. So we have to talk again and there are many things to be reported. It [Tibet] is not ready [for them to be] to put into practice. So we have to talk about the 17-Point [Agreement] again. In the 17-Point [Agreement], it was clearly written that the customs and habits of the Tibetan people should not be changed. Therefore, even if the reforms should be implemented, the way of the implementing the reforms should be done keeping up with the wishes, customs and the habits of the Tibetan people. It would not be appropriate [Tib. 'tsham po] to implement the reforms right away saying that it was written in the 17-Point [Agreement]." This was told by the two Sitsab at the beginning and the Kashag brought it to completion [Tib. mjug skyong]. The People's Association probably had submitted a report to the Kashag and said that the reforms should not be implemented.

The point is that when it was told that the reforms should not be implemented right away, the decision regarding the postponement of the reform for 6 years was made. I heard from the people in Lhasa that the Chinese leaders living in Lhasa received a telegraph order from Chairman Mao himself saying, "If it is not suitable with the wishes of the Tibetan people, it can be postponed until the people agree to implement the reform. We don't need to fix the time. You can spend whatever amount of expenditures that you need to spend in Lhasa because it is like putting things in one house. It is the same wherever you put them in that house. You should safeguard the borders, like the Indian borders. You should stop people going outside from Tibet. If the elderly people are kind of stubborn, just let them do it and let the people exhaust." He meant that when the stubborn people were exhausted, everything would belong to them.

But, at that time, Zhang Jingwu and Tan Guansan, who were then in Lhasa, were always talking about the implementation of the reforms because that was their duty. They wanted the reform to be implemented quickly. As soon as the Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region was instituted, dzong level administrative committees [Tib. dzong don gcod u yon lhan khang] were established in the counties as the branches of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

At that time, it was said that we should experiment [with] the reforms in several places. But at that moment, the counties didn't accept that because all of the dzongpön were Tibetan government officials. The dzongpön of the Tölung Dechen [Tib. stod lung de chen] was Bumtang Tsendrön [Tib. 'bum thang rtse mgon], who I heard was one of the most active people in Lhasa. His name was Gyentsen [Phüntso]. I heard that he had 3-4 phones on his table at home. When he was asked on the phone whether somebody should be beaten or arrested, he was always telling them to beat them up and arrest them. So he was beneficial for the Chinese and he also was powerful. He accepted the reforms the first time. At that time, Tölung Dechen Dzong was called the Tsede [Tib. tshal bde] Shidö. The first experiment was done in Tölung Dechen.

I heard that at that time, he moved into the kitchen of the dzong and they selected some youngsters of Tölung as the committee members [Ch. wei yuan] of the County Administrative Committee. He let the youngster stay in the main room [Tib. dzim chung], and he also didn't keep servants and cooked for himself. He also exempted taxes. All the matters in the dzong were decided by the youngsters and he didn't act verbally powerful.

Q: I guess at that time it was difficult for the Tibetan government to say that they didn't receive the income from the dzong, right?

A: Yes, if the Tibetan government had said something, the matter would be related [Tib. thug] with the Chinese. So they just left it like that. Instead of saying that that was good, all people were saying that that was bad and nobody followed them.

Anyway, the system remained the same until the cannons were fired in the revolt and they couldn't move a single step toward the reforms. At that time, they selected the tsodrag in the Dzong Administrative Committee. They acted tactfully and appointed them to work continuously, but the course of action [Tib. byed phyogs] was changed.

Q: Did they appoint new tsodrag or did they just appointed the old ones?

A: In the beginning, they showed the appearance of appointing the previous tsodrag, and they also selected some people who were not tsodrag but who were perceptive [Tib. mgo 'tshos mkhan] and were approved by all the people. Actually, after the revolt took place, all of the tsodrag were shut in jail without telling [them] any reason. They just shut in all the people who had kind of been heads [Tib. 'go], and they appointed the most base or evil people who were thoughtless and biting people like dogs, and they didn't hesitate and they were merciless. This was the basic of communism where they first behaved nicely toward the heads and after getting the power, all of the bad people became the leaders and the heads were all made to do the labor.

Q: Since the Chinese arrival, they might have talked about socialism, how did they do that? Did they show pictures and operas about socialism? Or did they talk about that at the meetings of the Youth League and the Women's Association?

A: I didn't hear anything about that kind of brain washing.

Q: I heard that they selected [Tib. sgrug] some poor people in the Kham area. I wonder what they did in the areas near Lhasa like Tölung and how they advised the poor people? They might also have been afraid of getting beaten if they would go to the countryside, right?

A: They did the trial reform, but nobody followed their example and it didn't create a kind of sensation [Tib. 'ur lang] to implement the reforms. Actually, they should have appointed the fathers of the households in the Dzong Administrative Committee, but they just selected the youngsters in that office. If they could have vested the power to the youngsters in all of the places, they would have been able to do their work easily, but they were unable to do that before 1959.

In other counties, when the County Administrative Committee was set up, the members were selected from the elderly people, like the tsodrag.

Q: What different kinds of work was the Dzong Administrative Committee doing? Did they have any kind of special work?

A: They probably didn't have any work and they were just holding some meetings because at that time, the dzongpön were there and the edicts from the Tibetan government were received by the dzongpön. And they were doing whatever they needed to do and they were just consulting the Dzong Administrative Committee.

Sometimes, they just held some meetings and told the people that they had to study. At that moment, they just instituted the committee, but they were unable to perform any kind of work.

Q: Supposing there would be a conflict among the miser, where did they report the matter?

A: They reported the matters to the dzong instead of reporting it to the Dzong Administrative Committee. Only in Tölung Tsede Dzong did the dzongpön come down and they paved the way of reporting the matter to the Dzong Administrative Committee, and they made the decision because the dzongpön himself voluntarily accepted it. So the Tibetan government was unable to stop him though it was inappropriate [Tib. 'tsham po] with the government's way of thinking.

Q: I heard from my father that they built a big building in Lhasa and told the Tibetan government officials to stay and work in that building, and they could go home on Saturdays and Sundays. Have you ever heard about that?

A: I have never heard about that. At that time, they said that the Tibetan government officials should do labor. Labor is very glorious. For example, Chairman Mao was also carrying a hoe and shovel and he was digging [in] the earth. At that time, Chairman Mao just came to inspect a coal mine in Fusiling, in China, and he took a hoe and shovel and went through the motions of doing labor for a second, and [then] they took the photo.

Back then, when they built the People's Hospital behind Jangse Shar [Tib. lchang gseb shar], one day, the Tibetan government officials were called to that place after the Trungpa was over in Norbulinga. When they got there, they probably told them to do labor. At that time, Trunychemmo Bumtang and his kind just rode their horses and went back home. Some of the government officials just went through the motions of doing labor by carrying a basket.

I heard that the lay officials, like Den Jatshangnga [Tib. ldan bya tshang ba], were wearing a kind of Chinese clothing and doing some labor voluntarily by moving some stones on the dam of the Lhasa River in the morning before that time. They were gradually trying to do those things, like imposing a tax, but at that time, no one yielded to them and they were inconvenienced to force people to do labor.

Q: I guess when they were doing that labor they went to dig out cesspools [Tib. rdzab dong]?

A: They probably did that.

Q: Those were done voluntarily, right?

A: They were saying that it was great and serving the people. Hence, they did that.

Q: I guess those who were doing the labor were thinking that socialism was good and it was beneficial for the people, right?

A: People could have different points of views. No matter [whether] they were doing it for flattery or [if] they were really thinking that it was good, anyway, some government officials took off their official uniform and did the labor.

Q: In 1956, when the Dalai Lama went to India, on the way, he probably visited Tashilhunpo for a short time.

A: He had to stay there over night on his way.

Q: At that time, were there any kind of troubles [Tib. rnyog dra] in Tashilhunpo?

A: It mainly depended on the conduct of the two dzasa of Tashilhunpo. If they didn't entertain the Dalai Lama nicely, that would be a matter related to the whole Labrang. But the main thing depended on the two dzasa.

I heard that the Panchen Lama's room was located on the highest floor and he came down to the inner courtyard to receive the Dalai Lama. Actually, he should have come to the bridge, the Sampa Shar [Tib. zam pa shar], to receive the Dalai Lama where the first reception was arranged. The Dalai Lama had to give a religious teaching, but Tashilhunpo didn't supply the things for the throne nicely. Of course, the Tibetan government didn't bring the throne with them. So they should have prepared the things and stitched the things even at night because they were informed early about his arrival. But, they didn't supply any good quality things and they just supplied some inferior quality things. Because of that, the Tibetan government officials were very disappointed.

Therefore, when the Dalai Lama came back, he was invited to the Shigatse Jidzong [Tib. spyi rdzong] instead of going to Tashilhunpo. He was elaborately entertained in the Jidzong and the things for the thrones were brought from Lhasa. When the Dalai Lama gave the teaching in a recreation center in a park [Tib. spro khang], in Shigatse, there might have been many people coming from different places to receive the teaching. When the teaching was to start at 9 a.m., around 10 a.m. the Tashilhunpo gave one khe of barley to all the monks in Tashilhunpo as alms. As for an ordinary monk, one khe of barley was a great deal. So if they would go to receive the teaching, they would have to give up one khe of barley. At that time, except [for] some of the monks [who] went to receive the barley, the majority of the monks gave up the barley alms and went to receive the teaching. They tried their best to cause hindrance to the teaching and to defame him [Tib. mtshan dma']. They acted like [they were] provoking a fight [Tib. brnyas brko].

Q: When the Panchen Lama went to India, I guess the Chinese told the Indian government that they should entertain the Panchen Lama the as same as the Dalai Lama.

A: Yes, they did. Actually, the Dalai Lama was like a king of Tibet who had a supreme power, but the policy of the Indian government was to demolish the kings. And they had demolished the kings all over India. So I guess that they disregarded the right of a king and they respected the Dalai Lama as the owner [Tib. bdag po] of Buddhism. And they also treated the Panchen Lama in the same way, though they knew there was a difference between the two of them.

At that time, they were implementing a policy for instigating and causing contradictions among the Tibetans so that they could use one of the groups for implementing their own policy. They might have been thinking that if the Tibetans were united as one, it would be difficult to implement their policy.

Q: When the Dalai Lama went to India, there were two groups and one of them was saying that the Dalai Lama should stay in India, and other said that he should go back. What did you hear about that?

A: I heard that some people said that he should stay in India. Trunychemmo Bumtang said, "The Dalai Lama should go back to one's own land. If he stays in India at this time, he won't be regarded even like a big trader. It would not be right to stay. At present, he is still young, so there would not be any problem for going back because the 17-Point [Agreement] was signed. Moreover, he hasn't done his studies [Tib. gsan bzhes]. So he should go back and do his studies." Some people said, "If the Dalai Lama gets into the Chinese hands, that would not be okay. He should stay in India."

Q: What do you mean study?

A: I mean the religious studies on the Buddhist dialectics. After that, he studied the Buddhist dialectics and graduated with his

Geshe Degree in 1958 when he turned 25.

Q: I guess among the people who told the Dalai Lama to stay, there must be the Jenkhentsisum, that is, Gyalo Thondup, Lobsang Gyentsen and Shakabpa?

A: They were probably among those people. And there must have been also some officials who were with the Dalai Lama saying the same because at that point, if the Dalai Lama would have come back, it seems that he was going to get into the hands of the Chinese. I don't know who the people stopping him were or who the people telling him to go back were.

Q: I also heard that Ngabö said, "If the Dalai Lama stayed in India, what kind of guarantee [Tib. khas len] do you have for getting the support?"

A: That was at the later time in 1956. The former one was when he went to Yadong when they talked about his studies.

Q: I meant the later one in 1956.

A: There were probably many government officials among the entourage saying he should stay. Mainly, the Jenkhentsisum said, "He shouldn't go back, he should definitely stay in India." In the end, they probably did the divination or the senriy and decided to go back to Tibet.

I heard Ngabö said, "If the Dalai Lama would stay in India, what confidence do you have? It is not right to say that he should stay in India. As a matter of fact, what kind of support do we have? How effective would it be? And they didn't have anything to say about that. They just said that if the Dalai Lama would get into Chinese hands, in the future there might be a danger to his life. So it would be better to stay while he has already arrived at India." At that moment, they didn't have anything to say, [like] that we had done this kind of preparation.

Q: After it was decided to come back, Ngabö and the Panchen Lama went back by air separately, right?

A: At that time there weren't any airports in Tibet.

Q: Did you ever hear about the reason why they came back by air?

A: I didn't hear anything about that.

Q: That was in 1957.

A: If so, there was an airport.

Q: I heard that Kalön Yuthok went to receive the Dalai Lama ,and after that he didn't come back to Tibet.

A: At that time, the Trunyichemmo Angula was also with Yuthok.

Q: I also heard that Yuthok was left there secretly as the representative in India. Have you ever heard about that?

A: That wasn't publicly known. I just heard that he stayed in India. I didn't hear anything about him [being] left as a representative. He probably was told to stay there internally.

Q: After Namseling and Samjola arrived at Drigu, some people said that they were probably sent by the government to help the Chushigandru in dealing with the dzong. Some people said that the Chushigandru didn't let them go, and seized [them] and kept them there. What do you think about that?

A: They were not seized and kept. When they were sent, there wasn't any talk regarding joining the Chushigandru. They were sent from the meeting for this purpose, "To mollify the zhongyang and to cease the unrest of the Khambas." It was said that they should be sent to talk with the Khambas. Before that, Minkyiling [Tib. smon skyid gling] and the abbot Ngagpa Khembo [Tib. sngas pa mkhan po] were sent, but they couldn't succeed.

The reason for sending two of them was that the Khambas were praising [Tib. bstod po] Namseling very highly, so it was thought that he might succeed [in] the talk. I heard from people in Lhasa that the Chinese told the Tibetan government that they should send Namseling, but I don't know the bottom line of that matter. Anyway, they were sent according to order of the Tibetan government to talk with the Khambas. After he got there, he didn't come back at all. Before Namseling left Lhasa, he had planned not to come back and sent his wife and children to Kalimpong. When he was sent to Lhoka, the order was issued from the gag (Secretariat).

But last year when Samjola came to attend a meeting, he told me, "When the two of us arrived there, we asked all the questions to the Drönyerchemmo regarding what practical action should be taken. We were receiving some edicts from the Kashag and we were just giving them [the Kashag] some pleasant sounding answers. After the two of us got there, we were making internal relations with him [Phala]."

Similarly, Shakabpa also told me, "We, the Jenkhentsisum, were asking the internal questions to Drönyerchemmo [Phala]." Khenjung Lobsang Gyentsen also said the same thing and he said, "We were asking the question through Tseja Gyentsenla to Drönyerchemmo. And regarding the course of action, we were contacting Tseja Gyentsenla." Chushigandru was also mainly trusting Phala.